



Personnel Recovery in a Non-Major Theater of War: A PARADIGM SHIFT

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We must rapidly transform our past combat search and rescue concept into one that uses all of our air, ground, and maritime capabilities to rapidly report, locate, support, recover, and return our Soldiers, civilians, and contractors to friendly control.

—Chief of Staff of the Army General Peter J. Schoomaker¹

BECAUSE OF THE nonlinear, noncontiguous nature of the modern battlespace, the risk of isolation extends to every Soldier and requires the effort of all concerned to assist in recovery. A significant part of the transformation General Peter J. Schoomaker refers to (left) requires that we understand the operational environment. While the tendency is to look at how personnel recovery (PR) is being accomplished in U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) as the best way to do business, the reality is that the operational environment in every other combatant command is significantly different from CENTCOM's. Consequently, while the principles of PR still apply, the application of those principles must be modified relative to the operational environment.

Clearly, a moral imperative extends to recovering all service members who are isolated, missing, detained, or captured.² While most resources and attention are understandably focused on the military efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, this does not relieve other regional combatant commanders of the responsibility to develop PR programs with a recovery architecture appropriate to their theaters of responsibility. In fact, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3270.01A, *Personnel Recovery within the Department of Defense*, requires each regional combatant commander to do so.³

Southern Command (SOUTHCOM) recognizes the need to adapt the principles of evolving PR doctrine to the specifics of the operational environment. Such adaptation is applicable to every regional combatant command (RCC). The U.S. military is conducting operations in every RCC, from theater security cooperation to stability operations to major combat operations. These operations are being conducted with different command and control (C2) structures, with coalition partners who have varying degrees of influence, and within sovereign partner nations with which our government has fluctuating diplomatic relationships. These variables are not accounted for in PR doctrine, but they must be considered when planning, preparing, and executing recovery operations.

Evolution of Doctrine

To understand SOUTHCOM's approach and its intrinsic, unique challenges, one must first understand the doctrinal PR model. In the past, what has evolved into personnel recovery was labeled combat search and rescue and was unique to aircrews and Special Operations Forces (SOF). From that perspective, units with the highest risk of isolation were trained to deal with the possibility of becoming isolated, and those same units provided trained and dedicated forces to recover isolated personnel.

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With a greater understanding of the asymmetric battlefield came the recognition that all personnel are at risk of isolation, and the more inclusive term “personnel recovery” was adopted. Since the SOF and aviation communities had the expertise for recovery, they were instrumental in developing initial PR doctrine and did so from the major theater of war (MTW) approach with which they were familiar. Consequently, the desired end-state of PR doctrine was to expand the sphere of coverage to a greater population, using similar resources and previously employed task organization. As a result, personnel recovery doctrine was developed to recover downed aircrews and SOF. The principal modification to this approach was to use assets for recovery not traditionally used for that purpose.

The methodology is to use planning tools such as the joint integrated prioritized target list and the air tasking order to locate enemy targets and, reflexively, to determine where the greatest probability of isolation is likely to occur. Based on that, planners can position dedicated recovery forces to best support those requirements, or they can identify assets on the battlefield that can expediently recover a person considered to be isolated, missing, detained, or captured.

With respect to the conduct of major combat operations in an MTW environment, the fundamental components of this approach are sound and in line with Schoomaker’s message. The components of personnel recovery are commanders and staffs, recovery forces, and the individual. Commanders and staffs task organize and exercise command and control of available forces to create an infrastructure that can execute the five PR tasks: report, locate, support, recover, and reintegrate isolated persons. Recovery forces can either be dedicated or designated. Forces that are specifically trained with a primary PR mission are dedicated recovery forces, while other forces, although not specifically trained to be recovery forces, might have skills that make them capable of conducting a recovery.

Individual PR skills are imparted through basic Soldier skills and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape (SERE) training. The approach to SERE is evolving from resistance-oriented training (how to withstand captivity) to survival-and-evasion-oriented training (how to avoid the captivity experience). Individual training also focuses on

every individual’s situational understanding of the supporting PR architecture. By understanding the architecture, individuals can most proactively assist in their own recovery.

PR in SOUTHCOM

In SOUTHCOM, the two most significant differences (from the MTW model) are who owns the battlespace and within that battlespace, who has the authority for conducting military operations. In CENTCOM (an MTW), those answers are relatively simple. The military coalition owns the battlespace and the military C2 structure has the authority for operations. Thus, personnel recovery takes a relatively simple approach: Identify where operations are to be conducted and, in parallel, allocate resources and plan for the eventuality of individuals becoming isolated.

In SOUTHCOM, the answers to the questions of battlespace ownership and authority are at first confusing and only get more so as different variables are added. First and foremost, the partner nations own the battlespace. These countries are sovereign nations, and without the appropriate presidential authority we must not violate that sovereignty. Effective authority for U.S. military operations is limited to that granted by the partner nation. In fact, it would be difficult to define (in a doctrinal sense) anyplace in SOUTHCOM as the command’s battlespace. Even in Colombia, where the Colombian Government is decisively engaged in combat operations against violent Marxist insurgents and self-defense groups such as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, the United States is limited to an advise-and-assist role. This effort is defined (and limited) by the Foreign Assistance Act of 1964 and the 2004 National Security Presidential Directive 18 (detailing support to counter narcotics).⁴ Even so, within the conduct of this advise-and-assist mission, a very real threat of isolation (and subsequent capture/detention) exists for U.S. personnel.

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Another factor affecting personnel recovery is that because operations take place within partner nations, the preeminent U.S. authority is the U.S. ambassador (as chief of the diplomatic mission), and the authority is vested in the president's mission letter. The effect on command and control of PR missions is that the traditional doctrinal model does not apply. In that model, launch-and-execute authorities for personnel recovery are vested wholly within the military C2 structure. According to the MTW model, the U.S. military should also control recovery assets, but that probably will not happen in SOUTHCOM. The result is that the PR architecture that current doctrine defines cannot be responsive to isolating incidents in SOUTHCOM. As Wade Chapple, Director of the Rescue Coordination Center in Colombia, says: "In Iraq and Afghanistan, the Personnel Recovery apparatus is fully dedicated and commanded by military officers possessing unilateral authority to launch or recover rescue forces. This paradigm does not exist in Colombia. We have no dedicated rescue assets (other than our rescue center) nor does any single U.S. military officer possess launch authority; not even the combatant commander. Rather, in order to participate in search and rescue operations, even when U.S. personnel are isolated, we must first acquire permission from the Colombian Government and approval from the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia. We have, however, managed to develop a quick, capable response mechanism."⁵

DOD an Integral Element

The principal effect of partner-nation sovereignty and delegation of authority to the chief of the diplomatic mission is that PR coordination must take place within the country in which the isolating event occurs. All of the authority and probably most of the resources reside in that country. This does not mean that the Department of Defense (DOD) is left out of the loop. To the contrary, DOD is integral to success. Although DOD might not have the requisite authority to unilaterally coordinate a recovery, it does have the expertise to do such a mission. An Institute for Defense Analysis study articulates this dichotomy in terms of two situations: the joint force commander in charge and the chief of mission in charge.⁶ The circumstances in SOUTHCOM are significantly more akin to the second example: If

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an isolating event occurs in SOUTHCOM, there might not be any DOD recovery assets in country, and getting them into country would take too long. So, where will recovery assets come from?

While every situation is different, the two most common sources for recovery assets are U.S. Government agencies and partner nations (most likely partner-nation military assets). In both cases, authority for coordination resides with the chiefs of diplomatic missions. In the event DOD assets are in country, the authority to deploy them for a recovery still resides with the chiefs because of the requirement to coordinate their use with the partner nation (airspace, rules of engagement, and so on) through the U.S. Department of State (DOS).

SOUTHCOM meets these challenges by using the existing infrastructure while fabricating the missing pieces. The focal point of this effort requires establishing a PR-knowledgeable entity in each country. Clearly this cannot happen overnight, but SOUTHCOM is accomplishing this one step at a time, one country at a time, based on priorities. Priority is dictated by several factors, including the number of U.S. military assigned or routinely deployed in a country, the threat to U.S. personnel, the level of support to PR (from DOS), and the level of support from the partner nation. In high-priority countries, the partner-nation entity is a personnel recovery center (PRC) consisting of an appropriate number of full-time, PR-trained persons who respond directly to the military group commander.⁷ Currently, all PRCs are manned by contractors because contractors have the specific skill sets required to coordinate PR issues.

Negative Sentiment Toward U.S.

In general, U.S. policies and initiatives regarding Latin America have been and are viewed as intrusive. Many people in the region are wary of U.S. hegemonic aspirations and violations of national sovereignty. Generally, partner nations in the area are guarded with respect to U.S. motives; they believe that a close association with the United States yields few benefits. Such negative public

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sentiment toward the United States constrains the ability of many states to cooperate on security matters, regardless of the potential benefit to their own security interests. Therefore, it is essential that SOUTHCOM emphasize the benefits a partner nation can gain from a cooperative effort to establish a PR infrastructure.

For SOUTHCOM to continue to help partner nations in their efforts at internal development, each country must provide adequate security for a stable environment. SOUTHCOM's primary focus is to help partner nations improve their security forces' capabilities in areas of mutual national interest. Since it is impractical for SOUTHCOM to deploy dedicated recovery capabilities, partner nations must provide a significant portion of these essential assets. Reflexively, it is our responsibility to help partner nations develop a PR capability.

Because the primary function of security-assistance offices (SAOs) is to execute the theater security cooperation program, ideally that program should manage the country teams' PR programs. Theater security cooperation is a DOS program (executed by DOD) that provides equipment, education, and training to partner-nation militaries. With an intrinsic part of SOUTHCOM's concept mandating the integration of partner-nation assets, the connection between PR and theater security cooperation provides bilateral support to both participants. Since the SAO helps determine partner-nation requirements and how those requirements, if filled, can support U.S. regional objectives, it is the perfect agency to coordinate support with the partner nation.

Working with the SOUTHCOM PR branch, each country team must develop a country-specific PR plan and get it approved by the partner-nation's U.S. ambassador. In this way, coordination procedures for an isolating event are codified before the event. Such procedures address coordination for use of U.S. interagency and DOD assets as well as procedures to coordinate for partner-nation assets.

There is growing support within U.S. embassies

to evolve this methodology into a PR annex and add it to the chief of the diplomatic mission's emergency action plan. The ideal situation would be to establish a PR coordinator in every country, but because this is fiscally impractical, a majority of country teams will establish a PR point of contact (POC), probably someone already assigned to the military group. The person selected would be a part-time PR coordinator, fulfilling the same coordination functions with government agencies and partner nations as a full-time PR coordinator. The responsibility to train the PR POC rests with SOUTHCOM. Because PR POCs are assigned to the military group, they are automatically integrated into the theater security cooperation process. As with the PR coordinator, PR POCs can be augmented when required.

The SOUTHCOM PR architecture also must maintain the ability to support a more traditional PR scenario. While it is unlikely that the United States will be involved in major combat operations in the SOUTHCOM area of responsibility, there is a high probability that SOUTHCOM will be required to execute stability and support operations in pursuance of U.S. goals and objectives. These scenarios will require the PR architecture to support operations more in line with doctrine.

The most likely scenario is that the combatant commander would task an assigned component commander to act as a joint force commander specific to a contingency. That commander would be responsible for a specific joint operation area. SOUTHCOM Regulation 05-11 requires the joint force commander to establish a personnel recovery coordination center (PRCC), the nucleus of which would be formed from the designated component's PRCC and augmented (as necessary) from other components to form a joint PRCC, if required.⁸ Regardless of the circumstances, the joint force commander's PR element would plug into the in-country PR infrastructure already developed

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by the PR coordinator or PR POC. The same concept would apply for exercises within the area of responsibility.

Each regional combatant commander must assess PR requirements based on the dynamics of the given operational environment. In many cases, it's probable that those requirements will extend beyond the traditional combat search and rescue doctrinal paradigm. The SOUTHCOM PR model provides a recovery capability that will meet the requirements of DOD Directive 2310.2 ("Personnel Recovery") and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3270.01A.⁹ With this model, ambassadors would be able to safeguard the lives of U.S. citizens isolated in any country.

While the responsibility for personnel recovery rests squarely on each RCC's shoulders, often the commanders cannot do PR alone; to succeed, they must coordinate their efforts with other U.S. Government agencies. Along with the interagency community, RCCs must strengthen existing bilateral relationships with partner nations in their areas of

responsibility. They must foster an understanding of the mutual utility of PR and the importance of a cooperative effort in developing a PR infrastructure. Given the advent of the non-linear battlefield, the rise of asymmetric warfare, and a corresponding increase in the likelihood that Soldiers can become isolated, go missing, or get captured, it is imperative that we develop and implement an effective multi-lateral, cooperative PR strategy that provides greater security for us and our partner nations. **MR**

NOTES

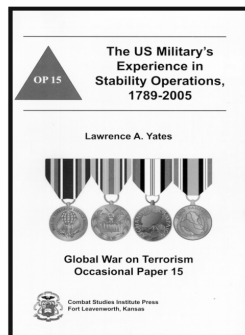
1. GEN Peter J. Schoomaker, message to the field, 16 May 2005.
2. "Isolated, missing, detained, or captured" is a phrase defined in the new Army Field Manual 3-50.1, *Army Personnel Recovery* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office [GPO], 10 August 2005).
3. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3270.01A, *Personnel Recovery Within the Department of Defense* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1 July 2003), A9-14.
4. For more information, see National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) George W. Bush Administration NSPD 18, Supporting Democracy in Colombia, November 2002 (not available on-line), and Foreign Assistance Act of 1964 (not available on-line).
5. Wade Chapple, Director of the Rescue Coordination Center in Colombia, presentation at the U.S. Southern Command Personnel Recovery Conference, January, 2005.
6. Institute for Defense Analyses Paper P-3779, *Interim Report on Interagency National Personnel Recovery Architecture*, Alexandria, Virginia, July 2003, on-line at <<http://stinet.dtic.mil/oai/oai?&verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=AD A440780>>, accessed 25 April 2006.
7. In this article, I refer to all security assistance organizations as military groups.
8. SOUTHCOM Reg 05-11.
9. U.S. DOD Directive 2310.2, "Personnel Recovery," 30 June 1997, on-line at <www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/html/23102.htm>, accessed 25 April 2006, and CJCSI 3270.01A.



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